

25th Anniversary Special Edition

Greenbelt News Review

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Vol. 26, No. 31

Greenbelt, Md.

July 5, 1962

The Greenbelt Story 1937 - 62

IN THE BEGINNING . . .

Greenbelt and "greenbelt towns" were still an idea on paper when President Franklin D. Roosevelt, on April 30, 1935, established by executive order the Resettlement Administration under the authority granted him by Congress in the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935. Named as head of this agency was Rexford Guy Tugwell who, as a fervent believer in "garden towns", had dreams of building a network of model communities in suburban areas adjacent to densely populated urban centers.

These model "garden towns" were intended to serve many purposes: (1) to give useful work to men on unemployment relief; (2) to demonstrate in practice the soundness of planning and operating towns according to certain garden city principles; and (3) to provide low-rent housing in healthful surroundings, both physical and social, for families of modest incomes.

To achieve this goal, the Federal government sought large tracts of land which under single ownership could be developed as planned communities, protected by encircling green belts. Such a green belt would provide small gardens and farm tracts for residents while protecting the towns from the encroachments of unplanned neighboring developments.

The Greenbelt site was selected for the demonstration town near the Nation's capital, after consultations with the Maryland State Planning Commission, Prince Georges County representatives, school district officials, officials from the National Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville and other local citizens. Two other sites selected were Greenhills, Ohio and Greendale, Wisconsin, located outside of Cincinnati and Milwaukee.

First of Three

This is the first of three special editions that the *News Review* plans to publish this summer commemorating the 25th anniversary of Greenbelt. The second and third editions will deal with the history of the various civic groups, churches, schools, and other municipal and voluntary activities, including descriptions of leading institutions and landmarks. There will also be articles giving interesting facts and sidelights of a personal nature with respect to Greenbelt's development.

\$97 An Acre

The site at Greenbelt was purchased at an average cost of about \$97 an acre, much of it from old Maryland families with titles going back to the original grants from the King of England. The land was no longer of much agricultural value. It had been overworked as farmland, especially for tobacco growing and had ceased to be used for this purpose. About 12,260 acres were purchased, but only about one-fourth of this land is now part of Greenbelt. Most of this acreage was later transferred for use by the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center.

The first spadeful of ground was turned on October 12, 1935, and actual construction of Greenbelt buildings commenced in February 1936. By September 1937, when the first tenants were ready to move in, more than 9,700 men had been given employment, totaling 7,883,400 man-hours. The total cost of the original project was estimated at \$13,450,000 including the amount paid for utilities, roadways, shopping center, and municipal services, and the cost of 3,371 acres of land.

From the first, Greenbelt was gen-

erally recognized as one of the world's foremost experiments in community planning. It was unique in that the entire municipality — streets, utilities, schools, stores, parks, and dwelling areas — was completely mapped on paper before any construction work was started. Even the form of government was decided upon before the community was established. On June 1, 1937, the town charter enacted by the Maryland State Legislature went into effect. It provided for the first manager-council type of government in Maryland's history.

The main streets were laid out along the crest of a horseshoe-shaped ridge. Shops, school, and other community buildings were grouped in the center of the horseshoe where they could be easily reached from all parts of town. Houses built to fit the natural contours of the hilly terrain were grouped in superblocks, four or five times as large as the usual city block. Instead of facing the street nearly all of the houses faced the interior of the block, which was laid out in lawns and playgrounds. Paths ran through the interior parks, safe from traffic.

Original Greenbelt

Original Greenbelt consisted of 885 dwelling units covering a little over 120 acres (217 acres with the community facilities) and costing \$4,799,000: 574 were in group houses, 306 in apartments, and 5 were detached houses built as an experiment in prefabrication. Four of the units were used for the medical center, one for a hotel apartment, and one for a demonstration home. There were also ten one-family homes (Parkbelt) constructed on leased land by a private developer, which were subsequently sold to private individuals.

Monthly rentals ranged from \$18 to \$41, with an additional monthly

GREENBELT NEWS REVIEW
AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

Published every Thursday by Greenbelt
Cooperative Publishing Assn., Inc.
Greenbelt, Maryland

Delivered each week to every home
in Greenbelt

Thursday, July 5, 1962

charge for electricity and water. The original eligibility requirements limited tenancy to families with an annual income of \$800 to \$2,200, and an important requirement was demonstrated need for more adequate housing. It was also considered important that the family indicate genuine interest in a progressive and cooperative town such as that envisioned by the Greenbelt planners. To provide Greenbelt with first-rate leadership, the government used a trained staff of family selection specialists to interview and select, from the thousands of applicants, those families whose residence in Greenbelt could be expected to be of the greatest benefit to the community.

LEARNING TO WALK . . .

Greenbelt's first five families, containing 14 persons, moved in on September 30, 1937, and by the middle of October, Greenbelt's population had grown to 45 families. Immediately the task was begun of establishing the town's political, economic, and social institutions.

The first step was taken on November 8, 1937 when some 200 persons gathered in the school auditorium to organize the Greenbelt Citizens' Association for the purpose of providing a public forum for the consideration and discussion of vital city problems. The second step was the creation of a town newspaper which would disseminate information and make accessible to the community the facts needed to arrive at sound decisions. On November 11 a Journalistic Club was formed and a plan adopted calling for the issuance of weekly journals to be known as the *Greenbelt Cooperator* (now known as the *Greenbelt News Review*). The first issue of the *Cooperator* appeared on November 24, 1937 and was a mimeographed paper containing sixteen pages of local news and editorial content.

On November 23, 1937, 96 percent of the registered voters went to the polls and elected their first town council. (Greenbelt was not designated a city until its charter was amended on June 1, 1949.) This council, in turn, elected Louis Bessemer as

Greenbelt's first mayor and appointed Roy S. Braden as town manager. Braden was community manager for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which had taken over ownership and operation of the project after the liquidation of the Resettlement Administration in September 1937. The councilmen were elected only for one year, as were also the councilmen in 1938. It was not until the September 1939 election that a full-term council for two years was elected.

Government

The functions of the town government and the Federal government were closely interrelated and to some extent overlapping. From 1937 to 1946, the Federal officer in general charge of Greenbelt — the community manager — was designated by the town council as the town manager.

As town manager, he was administrative head of the municipal government which included the departments of public safety, health, public works, recreation, and sanitation. He was also subject to removal by the town council. As community manager, he was the landlord — received and investigated applications for homes, collected rents, maintained the grounds, made repairs, furnished heat, light, and water, and exercised general supervision over the property.

This dual relationship also extended to other administrative posts. The administrative assistant for FSA was also director of public safety for the town of Greenbelt at a salary of \$1 a year. Another \$1-a-year man was the town treasurer who otherwise was chief accountant for FSA on the premises.

Cooperative Living

Even before the first residents moved in, the cooperative seed had been planted in Greenbelt. On September 2, 1937, the Department of Agriculture signed an agreement with Consumer Distribution Corporation, a cooperative founded by the late Edward A. Filene, Boston merchant and philanthropist, to organize all commercial enterprises at Greenbelt on a consumer cooperative basis.

Greenbelt Consumer Services

Consumer Distribution Corporation advanced the sum of \$50,000 to organize a subsidiary, Greenbelt Consumer Services, Inc. (GCS), which would set up and operate the stores. The goal was eventual ownership and operation of these stores by the Greenbelt residents. The original agreement provided that if Greenbelters did not purchase GCS by December 31, 1939, the government could repossess the stores and lease them to private enterprise.

Among the services that were soon provided by GCS were a food store,

a gasoline-filling station, a drug store, a barber shop, a movie theater, a valet shop, a beauty parlor, a variety store, and finally, a tobacco shop, in that order.

Greenbelt Health Association

Another unique local cooperative that got off to an early start was the Greenbelt Health Association. Greenbelt's need for a physician was acute. Its particular problem was to obtain adequate medical care for a population whose incomes averaged in the neighborhood of \$1,600 per annum. Another problem was the fact that the nearest hospital was over 10 miles distant.

Greenbelt Health Association followed the general pattern of the consumer-owned group clinic, Group Health Association, Inc., which had been established during the fall of 1937 at Washington, D. C. by Federal government employees. The emphasis was on prepaid contributions, preventive medicine, group practice, and consumer control.

On April 1, 1938, the Health Association opened its clinic, with Dr. James Spencer Dryden in attendance. Dr. Dryden was compensated on a salary basis, but was permitted to treat non-members on a fee-for-service basis, paying the association a portion of that income for the use of its office and equipment.

The following year saw the opening of a municipal hospital at 30 Ridge road on May 1, 1939. The hospital included two operating rooms, an X-ray room, a drug room, a kitchen and laboratory. Accomodations were limited to six adults, three children, and three infants.

Other Organizations

As new residents continued to move in throughout the first year, the number of organizations and clubs mushroomed. American Legion Post No. 136, with 35 members, received a temporary charter on December 3, 1937. Still in December, a cooperative Federal credit union was established to provide local banking facilities; the first Parent-Teachers Association was formed; and a committee of Protestant laymen launched a plan for a Community Church to minister to the religious needs of all Protestant worshippers without regard to denomination. Shortly thereafter, a Catholic parish was formed, to be followed by a Church of Latter-Day Saints and a Hebrew congregation. These religious groups in February 1938 established an Interfaith Committee that sought to foster religious understanding and promote brotherhood.

Early in 1938 a mother's club was formed, and as a result of its activities, a nursery school and kindergarten were later organized. Other groups



Airview of Greenbelt, made in September 1937 just before the project was opened for occupancy. On left are brick and cinder block homes. In right foreground is Hillside Rd., looking toward shopping center and Southway at upper right.

formed in the early months were Boy Scout Troop 202 and Cub Pack 202, sponsored by the Citizens' Association, and Girl Scout Troop No. 17. A source of entertainment to the community was a neighborhood little theater group, the Greenbelt Players, which put on a series of productions until the war years. Among other recreational groups were an athletic club, a camera club, hobby club, bridge club, garden club, rifle and gun club, and a radio club.

Public Attraction

Greenbelt captured the public's imagination from the start. It is estimated that every week saw over 5,000 visitors, many of them attracted by newspaper reports, not always accurate or favorable. An example of one garbled report was that tenants had to check in and out of the community as if it were a military camp. This, the newspapers said, was the last straw in Government regimentation and infringement of liberty.

In actuality, the situation was this. During the construction period a regular guard force was maintained as a precaution against theft of materials and equipment. A guard was stationed at the two entrances

to the project 24 hours a day and anyone entering or leaving had to pass the scrutiny of this sentry. This rule was still in effect after the first tenants moved in and continued until construction was completed in June 1938.

The farther the newspaper from the local scene, the more dramatic the report. The *Denver Post*, for example, was quoted as calling Greenbelt "a topsy-turvey town where no one knew whether they were approaching a front or back door and where people could hardly find their way home at night." It also reported how "people hated to hang out their 'panties' to the public gaze".

Rules and Regulations

The origin for many of these reports stemmed from the rules and regulations laid down by FSA for tenants. These rules concerned such matters as the use of garages and parking spaces, disposal of garbage, hours for hanging out wash, and keeping of pets. Persons who protested these regulations appealed to the Washington newspapers. The result was often editorials proclaiming, for example, that such letters bore evidence to the fact that "the good old American trait of stubborn individual-

ism is still our solid bulwark against the regimented beehive economy into which Europe has fallen."

The opening of the swimming pool in May 1939 and the passage of a town ordinance banning the wearing of shorts in the commercial center was another opportunity for the Washington newspapers to poke fun "at another example of regimentation."

GROWING PAINS . . .

Greenbelt faced many problems in its early days. One was that of transportation to Washington, D. C. The Federal Government had from the first recognized that the prospect of living in an isolated community with three or four of each day's waking hours devoted to travel was enough to dampen the enthusiasm of all but the most hardy. It therefore entered into a 12-month contract with Capital Transit Company to provide a limited-stop bus service between the Greenbelt center and the intersection of Ninth Street and Constitution Avenue, N. W., a distance of 12.8 miles.

The contract guaranteed the company a minimum annual return of 6 percent on its investment. The net

result was a monthly subsidy of around \$800 - \$900. Consequently, at the end of the first year — in April 1939 — the government decided not to renew the contract.

In its place Capital Transit operated a shuttle bus between Greenbelt and Berwyn. From there the balance of the trip had to be negotiated by slow street car. In January, this shuttle service was extended to Mt. Rainier. During the next decade, as costs rose and the number of passengers dropped off, Capital Transit reduced its service. Finally, in March 1951, Capital Transit was granted permission to discontinue all service to Greenbelt.

In June 1951 the city initiated its own bus service from Greenbelt to Berwyn by purchasing a bus that had been used by Greenbelt Consumer Services in providing transportation between the North End of town and the commercial center. Except for the first few years of operation, the bus has been running continually at a deficit. Throughout the years, efforts have been made to interest a public carrier in providing direct bus service between Greenbelt and downtown Washington, but the problem appears no nearer solution today than it was 25 years ago.

The Co-op Stores

Another decision faced by Greenbelters in the early years concerned the purchase of Greenbelt Consumer Services (GCS). Under the original agreement signed by the Federal Government, the local cooperative purchasing the store had to have 50 percent of the occupied dwellings join in the enterprise, at least to the extent of investing in a \$10 share. This goal was not achieved until December 1939.

On January 9, 1940, Greenbelters took over the operation of the stores which had 35 employees and were grossing over a third of a million dollars annually. A sum of \$5,000, raised primarily through the sale of stock to over 400 Greenbelters, was paid to Consumer Distribution Corporation as an initial down payment. A debt of \$35,000 remained which was paid off in less than 6 years.

Rents and Incomes

A third problem concerned the government's rental policy which provided that the lease of a tenant could not be renewed if his total family income had increased to 25 percent more than his maximum entrance income. It was feared that enforcement of this policy would deprive the town of many of its most active families.

One of the solutions sought to this problem was a privately financed and constructed home-building program on the vacant land in the project,

which would permit the over-income families to enjoy the privileges of Greenbelt without depriving lower income families of needed low-cost housing. The Farm Security Administration was receptive and agreed to lease land (area now occupied by Woodland Hills subdivision) for this purpose, and with no income restrictions on occupants.

The war intervened, however, and the shortage of building supplies led to the suspension of the home-building program. At the same time, the government abandoned its income limitation policy and substituted a policy of placing rents on a sliding scale in accordance with ability to pay.

Health Program

A fourth crisis dealt with Greenbelts' health program. Limited income under the Greenbelt Health Association (GHA) plan made it difficult from the start to attract capable doctors. The municipal hospital also ran into financial difficulties — ending up with deficits of \$10,300 in 1939, \$6,600 in 1940, and \$8,000 in 1941. In the latter case, FSA refused to sanction further support by its payments in lieu of taxes, and the hospital was forced to close its doors on January 31, 1962. Residents voted down a proposal that each family pay \$12 annually for the hospital.

GHA lingered on for quite a while, but suffered continuous crises not only involving financial matters but also personality clashes between the doctors and the board of directors. By May 1950, the membership had dropped to 180 families from the 377 in December 1940. In June 1950, the board and membership decided to dissolve the association. Surplus funds were kept in escrow until January 1958, when they were donated to the Greenbelt Rescue Squad for equipment.

THE WAR YEARS . . .

The war years saw a major change in the physical structure of Greenbelt. As early as February 1941, the Federal Government announced that a thousand homes for defense workers were to be constructed at Greenbelt as one of forty-three defense-housing projects throughout the United States designed to relieve the housing shortage for persons engaged in defense activities. Funds were to be provided under the terms of the \$150 million Lanham Act for defense housing.

Defense Homes

Construction was started in July 1941, and the first families moved in by December 1941. Excluding the land, which had already been paid for, and the school facilities, which were later added, the entire cost of these 1,000 dwelling units, miscellaneous build-

ings, roads, and utility systems was estimated at \$4,453,200.

The so-called defense homes development was planned to carry out the model design of the original town, within the limits of available funds. There was the same emphasis on open spaces and on fitting the homes to the contour of the land. Like the original homes, the defense houses were laid out in superblocks and faced the interior of the blocks rather than the streets. But because funds were limited, the interior network of paths was not extended. Underpasses were omitted, thus eliminating the greatest safety feature of the original town. Not enough shade trees were planted and in general the landscaping was inadequate.

Schools And Shopping

The addition of the defense homes raised many problems. Foremost was that of school facilities. The Center elementary school was placed on a double shift as its attendance increased from 385 in 1939 to 785 in 1943. A building in the North End designed for apartments was converted into a temporary school to accommodate kindergarten and first and second-grade children. It was not until the end of the 1944-45 school year that a 12-classroom North End elementary school costing \$138,400 was constructed. At the same time, the Greenbelt High School (now the Greenbelt Junior High School) was enlarged by nine rooms at a cost of \$97,147.

Another problem arose out of the fact that there were no shopping facilities in the North End. The commercial center had been planned so that no occupant of original Greenbelt would be more than a half-mile away. For some residents of North End, the shopping center was now over a mile walking distance, mostly unlevel land. When the defense homes were built, a site had been set aside for a North End shopping center, but there were no funds available.

Greenbelt Consumer Services (GCS) filled the breach as best it could. In January 1943 it converted four of the rental units on Laurel Hill road into a temporary grocery store which stayed in existence until 1956. (The store was later purchased by Greenbelt Homes, Inc. and converted into four housing units.) GCS also established a Co-op Pantry or traveling market — a store on wheels that made the rounds of the town daily with a varied stock of groceries, fruits, and other supplies, conveniently displayed for customers who walked through the truck. This service continued until September 1950.

A bus line was also established by GCS in 1945, bringing customers from all parts of the town to the center.

The charge was a nickel. The bus driver even delivered prescriptions from the drug store.

Two minor changes in Greenbelt's physical shape also took place in the war years. In 1944, Federal Public Housing Authority (which succeeded FSA in 1942) constructed a new maintenance building on Oldham road (later changed to Hamilton road) and an extension to the commercial center (now occupied by the Suburban Trust Company). The fact that these buildings were erected before the much-needed school in the North End stirred much resentment, but it was explained that two different government appropriations were involved.

Population

Not only did the physical shape of Greenbelt change during the war, but also its people. Because of the low average age of its residents, Greenbelt gave an unusually high percentage of its population to the Armed Forces, and fifteen of its boys made the supreme sacrifice.

During the year ending in September 1942, the turnover in the town's population averaged 32.5 percent, compared with 20 percent in the pre-war years. A city report showed that in September 1944 — seven years after Greenbelt was opened — only 313 of the original 879 families were still here.

So many men left Greenbelt that a Cooperator editorial of March 17, 1944 referred to it as "a woman's town." Even on the distaff side, many chose to join the services or otherwise contribute directly to the war effort.

THE POST-WAR YEARS . . .

The post-war years saw a further expansion of the town. The co-op opened a new supermarket on November 9, 1948, 62 by 174 feet, at a cost of approximately \$225,000, exclusive of the cost of equipment. The building was 2½ times the size of the old food store which had been located in the area now occupied by the laundromat and post office. The space vacated by the old food store made possible the expansion of the variety store into a junior department store. A bowling alley was added to the basement of the supermarket in November 1950.

Churches

An important development during this period was the securing of local homes by the churches after much patience and perseverance. Public Housing Administration (successor agency to FPHA) required that to make land available to churches, it must first be advertised for public sale. To preclude other interests from bidding against the churches, the town council zoned the sites (which had been previously selected) for church use only. Five of the Greenbelt churches—St. Hugh's Catholic Church,

Members of Council

First Council November 1937 - September 1938

Sherrod E. East
Robert E. Jacobsen
Louis Bessemer
Allen D. Morrison
Henry H. Maurer

Second Council September 1938-39

Henry H. Maurer
Louis Bessemer
Allen D. Morrison
Ruth Taylor
Walter R. Volckhausen

Third Council September 1939-41

Henry H. Maurer
George A. Warner
Ruth Taylor
Arthur N. Gawthrop
Thomas B. Ricker
Edward Walther (appointed)
Joseph E. Bargas (appointed)
Sherrod E. East (appointed)

Fourth Council September 1941-43

Allen D. Morrison
Curtiss F. Barker
Francis J. Lastner
Thomas B. Ricker
George F. Bauer

Fifth Council September 1943-45

Allen D. Morrison
Francis J. Lastner
Fred A. DeJaeger
George F. Bauer
Paul Dunbar
Charles F. Drass (appointed)

Sixth Council September 1945-47

George F. Bauer
Allen D. Morrison
Paul Dunbar
Joseph L. Rogers
John A. Cain

Seventh Council September 1947-49

Thomas J. Canning
David M. Granaham
Elizabeth S. Harrington
Francis J. Lastner
Allen D. Morrison

the Community Church, the Mowatt Memorial Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Jewish Community Center — then submitted bids in December 1948 which were accepted. A sixth church — Greenbelt Baptist Church — secured a site at a later date in 1955. All the churches have constructed their own buildings.

Armory

Another local organization to secure a home at this time was the Greenbelt National Guard unit organized in January 1948. The Federal Government dedicated 8 acres of land to the State of Maryland for an armory in October 1949. On the site at the juncture of Glenn Dale road and Southway was constructed a \$300,000 building containing a drill hall, which doubled as an auditorium, three attractively furnished lounges, an equipped kitchen,

Eighth Council September 1949-51

Elizabeth S. Harrington
Thomas J. Canning
Francis J. Lastner
Steve L. Comings
James N. Wolfe
Robert T. Bonham (appointed)

Ninth Council September 1951-53

Francis J. Lastner
James D. Wolfe
Thomas J. Canning
Steve L. Comings
Benjamin P. Goldfaden
James C. Smith (appointed)

Tenth Council September 1953-55

Francis J. Lastner
James D. Wolfe
Thomas J. Canning
Benjamin P. Goldfaden
Robert Hurst

Eleventh Council Sept. 1955-57

Thomas J. Canning
James D. Wolfe
Robert Hurst
James C. Smith
Alan Kistler
Benjamin P. Goldfaden
(appointed)

Twelfth Council Sept. 1957-59

Thomas J. Canning
James C. Smith
Alan Kistler
Benjamin P. Goldfaden
Stanley R. Edwards

Thirteenth Council Sept. 1959-61

Alan Kistler
Thomas J. Canning
Edgar L. Smith
David C. Champion
Bruce L. Bowman

Fourteenth Council Sept. 1961-

Francis W. White
Thomas J. Canning
David C. Champion
Benjamin P. Goldfaden
William R. Phillips

indoor rifle range, seven classrooms, and a suite of offices. The building was completed in May 1955, and is now the headquarters of Battery B, 2nd Howitzer Battalion, 110th Artillery.

Youth Center

One development of keen interest to the youth of Greenbelt was the acquisition of a \$1,300 surplus public housing demonstration building for use as a youth center. The young people held a tagday and succeeded in raising the initial \$100 required for a down payment. To meet other expenses involved in transporting the building to Greenbelt, equipping the building, and installing the necessary utilities, approximately \$5,000 was raised by means of a house-to-house fund-raising campaign, community dances, a bingo party, and a car raffle.

The building, christened the Drop Inn, was opened in May 1947 at a site off the parking lot behind the food store. The structure, 72 by 40 feet, was converted into a large social room, game room, kitchen, and snack bar. It stayed in existence until October 1954, when the activities of the teen-agers were transferred to the Community Building (Center School).

THE BIG CHANGEOVER . . .

But the big event of Greenbelt's post-war history was the withdrawal of the Federal Government from the scene.

As early as August 1940, reports had circulated that the Federal Government was considering the transfer of Greenbelt to a non-profit local housing corporation or authority. After the war, reports of such a transfer persisted, and finally were verified.

Since the Federal Government owned practically everything in Greenbelt, the problem of disposing of the project was not restricted just to the homes. There were also the commercial and municipal buildings, the recreation and park areas, the swimming pool, the roadways, the public utilities, and the vacant land.

In July 1946, about 400 residents of Greenbelt formed a mutual housing cooperative to negotiate with the government for the purchase of the entire project. Public Housing Administration (PHA) at first contended that the sale of original Greenbelt could not be negotiated but must be made as the result of advertising and competitive bidding.

This impasse was resolved by an act of Congress (Public Law 65), approved May 19, 1949, which authorized PHA to sell the greenbelt towns without regard to provisions of existing law requiring competitive bidding or public advertising and at a fair market value as determined on the basis of an appraisal by an independent real estate expert. The Act further provided that first preference in purchasing be given to veteran groups organized on a nonprofit basis, provided they accepted as members with full privileges, any tenant occupying a dwelling unit in the particular project at the time of his application. A down payment of at least 10 percent of the purchase price was specified, the remaining balance to be amortized over a period of not more than 25 years and to bear interest at 4 percent per annum.

Housing Corporation

To meet the veteran requirement, the local housing cooperative reorganized itself into the Greenbelt Veterans Housing Corporation (GVHC). The name was later changed in July 1957 to Greenbelt Homes, Inc.

In June 1950, PHA announced the terms and price for the city's sale. It

First Post-Sale GHI Board



The first board, elected in February, 1953, after the purchase of the housing project from the Federal Government, included: (l. to r. standing) Donald Kern, Joseph Fitzmaurice, Adelbert Long, Ralph Webster, and general manager Paul Campbell. Seated (l. to r.) are directors Bernard Bordenet, Bruce Bowman, Mike Salzman, Elliot Bukzin, Percy Andros.

offered all of the housing units, the commercial facilities, and that part of the undeveloped land not otherwise earmarked for \$8,522,350. Excluded from the sale were 1,148 acres of land south of Greenbelt road which were later dedicated to the National Capital Planning Commission for a recreation area. Also excluded was the land west of Edmonston road and east of the proposed Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

GVHC accepted the proposal to negotiate, but the outbreak of the Korean conflict and the possible need for emergency housing led to the placing of a general freeze on all government property. Negotiations were not resumed until two years later and finally, on September 26, 1952, GVHC, which had previously been designated as the preferred negotiator, executed a preliminary contract of purchase for the 1,575 dwelling units at a price of \$6,285,450.

The Big Sale

Title was transferred on December 30, 1952 when GVHC president Michael Salzman handed PHA Commissioner John Taylor Egan certified checks for the required 10 percent down payment. Money for the down payment, over and above that contributed by members, was advanced by Peoples Development Corporation, a subsidiary of the Farm Bureau Insurance Companies (now Nationwide Insurance Co.), another cooperative. The PDC loan of \$150,000 at 5 percent interest was paid off by GVHC in four years.

In order that there would be no financial liability on the individual members of GVHC, the vacant residential land was purchased by GVHC in an independent transaction, with a separate mortgage. The 707.88 acres of vacant land were obtained for \$670,219 with the corporation making a 10 percent down payment, the balance secured by a 15-year mortgage at 4 percent interest. Again \$150,000

was borrowed from Peoples Development Corporation at 5 percent to make the initial down payment and to cover initial carrying expenses on the land for debt service, taxes, and land use services.

Yet remaining for disposition by the Federal Government were about 306 apartment units, approximately 850 acres of undeveloped land, the commercial properties, recreational facilities, and the public utilities. PHA was authorized by Congressional action to transfer some of these facilities and areas to the local government.

Dedication to City

In fact, PHA had already in April 1952 dedicated some 9½ miles of roads to the city, excluding the courts and parking areas. (The courts were later in April 1954 dedicated to the city by GVHC.) On February 14, 1953, PHA dedicated to the city the water-distribution system, the sewer mains and sewage-disposal plant, the fire alarm system, the community building, the swimming pool, sanitary fill area, lake area and picnic grounds, Indian Springs cemetery, athletic field, the underpasses, warehouses, 17 small parks and playgrounds, and certain public road easements.

Not included in the dedication was the fire and police department building (now occupied by Greenbelt Realty Co.). The Center Mall and the parking lot behind the supermarket (but not the west parking lot) were later dedicated to the city. The electric-power system was sold by PHA to the Potomac Electric Power Company. In 1958 the city dedicated the water and sewage-disposal system to the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC).

At one point the situation was so confused over what was being dedicated to the city that WSSC spent about \$15,000 renovating the water tower under the impression that the tower was on property that would be

dedicated to WSSC. The tower turned out to be on city property and the improvements were gratis.

Other Property

The next step in the withdrawal of the Federal Government from the local scene was taken in April 1953, when the 12 apartment buildings were put out for open competitive bids. Greenbelt Development Corporation, a subsidiary of GVHC, acquired for a 20 percent down payment two apartment buildings on Parkway, containing 60 apartments, a double row of garages and a choice corner site, at a cost of \$166,812. PHA took a 25-year mortgage on this property at 4½ percent interest. The ten other apartment buildings were sold to private individuals.

In June 1954, the remaining undeveloped land was sold at open competitive bids to private individuals. Involved were 505 acres west of Edmonston road and 313 acres east of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. To date little development has taken place on this land, all of which is within the corporate limits of Greenbelt. A new shopping center, called the Belway Plaza, was opened on the tract near the B & O railroad in February 1962. A luxury-type apartment project known as Springhill Lake is expected to rise shortly in the area northwest of the Greenbelt Junior High School.

The final act in the drama took place in October 1954 when the last piece of PHA property in Greenbelt was sold. Involved were the properties of the commercial center (exclusive of the land previously purchased by GCS for its supermarket). The high bidder was a private real estate firm from Philadelphia. Upon the expiration of its leases in October 1956, GCS vacated the various stores comprising the commercial center and consolidated its food, drug, and general merchandise operations into the supermarket building, which had been expanded at a cost of \$200,000. Also vacated was the old gasoline station when GCS opened up a new \$100,000 station on Southway.

The attitude of the town toward the Federal Government's withdrawal was probably best summed up by an editorial in the April 16, 1953 *Cooperator*: "How long we have waited to get out of the clutches of PHA and its control of our budget and city services." But all was not smooth sailing.

Finances and Taxes

The immediate impact of Federal withdrawal was on the finances of the city government. The city was now required to perform major construction and repair work and to provide insurance and maintenance for the community building, parks, and

MAYORS OF GREENBELT

Louis Bessemer

Henry H. Maurer
George A. Warner
Arthur N. Gawthrop
Allen D. Morrison
George F. Bauer
Thomas J. Canning
Elizabeth S. Harrington
Francis J. Lastner
Thomas J. Canning
Alan Kistler
Francis W. White

November 1937 - September 1938
September 1938 - January 1940
January 1940 - February 1941
February 1941 - September 1941
September 1941 - September 1945
September 1945 - September 1947
September 1947 - September 1949
September 1949 - June 1951
June 1951 - December 1954
December 1954 - September 1959
September 1959 - September 1961
September 1961 -

City Managers

Roy S. Braden
James T. Gobbel
Charles T. McDonald

November 1937 - October 1943
October 1943 - July 1948
July 1948 -

Population Of Greenbelt

1940	2,831
1950	7,074
1960	7,479

other facilities, the costs of which were formerly borne by PHA. The city also faced the prospect of paying rent for the fire and police department building and the city administration offices, which it had previously occupied free. Already, since March 1950, the city had carried the cost of trash collection as part of that year's agreement with PHA regarding its payments in lieu of taxes.

With PHA no longer providing payments in lieu of taxes, the community had to depend on its own tax resources to finance the services its citizens had become accustomed to. The city already had one of the highest tax rates in Prince Georges County, as it was providing services that few communities in Maryland could match.

Economies

A harbinger of what was to come was the decision of the city to discontinue the kindergarten after June 1, 1952, as the result of PHA's refusal to permit its payments to be used to support the kindergarten.

With the changeover, other services were also given a close scrutiny. The hope was that greater dependence could be placed upon county facilities that had frequently been declined in the past because of a conviction that Greenbelt could do better.

As a result of this review, the budget for the calendar year 1955 eliminated two duplicative services for which the taxpayers had been paying taxes to both the city and the county. The first was the library which had been a city-supported activity since its inception in June 1939. It was integrated into the Prince Georges County Memorial Library system

on July 1, 1955. The other was the city-financed Greenbelt Fire Department which was converted into a volunteer fire department. This move made the fire department, together with the local rescue squad, eligible to receive county and State financial support.

Another economy move led to the elimination of a full-time public health nurse. In addition, the garbage and trash collection service was dropped as a budget item and put on a service fee basis, thus excluding it from the tax rate. Through these efforts, the city was able to bring the tax rate down from \$2.14 per \$100 assessed valuation in 1954 to \$1.71 in 1955.

EXPANSION OF GREENBELT . . .

One of the chief arguments for lowering of the tax rate was to encourage new residential construction in Greenbelt. Progress was slow, however, despite the hopes raised by the opening of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway in October 1954 which reduced the commuting time from Greenbelt to downtown Washington to 25 minutes.

The 709 acres of vacant land purchased by GVHC was transferred in June 1954 to Greenbelt Land Improvement Corporation (GLIC), its wholly-owned subsidiary. After several unsuccessful attempts by cooperative housing organizations to develop the vacant land, GVHC sold GLIC to Warner-Kanter Construction Company, a private developer, in May 1955. This developer, however, also had difficulties in getting started, although four demonstration homes were built at the semicircle between the Greenbelt Armory and the American Legion Home.

Thus, for the first five years following the sale of the undeveloped land to GVHC the only new housing in Greenbelt were the Lakeside and Woodland Hills subdivisions. The former consisted of 65 single-family house lots in a 25-acre wooded area overlooking the Greenbelt athletic field and the lake. The fully-developed lots were purchased as a unit from GVHC at the end of 1953 by a group of local residents. Each lot owner was free to construct his own home, although required to adhere to standards set by the homeowners association.

Woodland Hills consisted of 49 lots along Northway and Woodland Way extended on 18 acres of land that had been purchased from Warner-Kanter in December by a local cooperative. The homes were constructed under cooperative principles but each homeowner received individual title to his home.

In 1958, Warner-Kanter sold a 38-acre site off Crescent road adjacent to the Woodland Hills subdivision to J. Evans Buchanan & Co., who within a year erected 104 free-standing detached homes in a subdivision named Lakewood. Also in 1959 four luxury-type, air-conditioned apartment buildings containing 83 units, known as the Greenbelt Plaza Apartments, were constructed in the Parkway area by a private developer, Charles Bresler.

Government Building

Matching the attempts at private building, the city of Greenbelt also engaged in a building program. The need for a recreation building, a volunteer fire department and rescue squad building, and a municipal office building had been felt for years. With the closing of the condemned Drop-Inn in October 1954, the youth of Greenbelt were particularly handicapped, even though they were still able to schedule activities at the Community Building (Center School).

In June 1959, the city secured initial funds for the building program by selling the Community Building to Prince Georges County Board of Education for \$260,000. In September 1959, the voters approved a referendum calling for a \$200,000 long-term loan or bond issue to provide the additional financing needed to construct all three buildings.

The year 1961 saw the completion of both the volunteer fire department and rescue squad building and the recreation building. The former was located on Crescent road between St. Hugh's Rectory and Parkway and cost \$146,089, including \$7,912 for city-contributed labor and equipment.

The recreation building, officially titled the Greenbelt Youth Center, was placed on a hillside site northwest of the swimming pool and overlooking the

Following is the famous article which appeared in the first issue of the Cooperator and was reprinted in the Baltimore Sun. Written by Mary E. Van Clevve, it captured the pioneer spirit of the early settlers of Greenbelt.

We Pioneers

We did not arrive in Greenbelt after long, tiresome miles by covered wagon; nor did we find this place by chance. We were not first to gaze upon this spot of ground; nor did we cut down trees in order to build our homes. Nor is it necessary to clear the land to plant our crops that we may eat, nor dig a well that we may quench our thirst.

Yes, we are pioneers — of a new way of living. We are the sculptors handling the soft, yielding clay of a new community. What form shall we mold out of it?

This project has given most of us an opportunity we'd never anticipated. We are in the process of creating homes! Our families and our children will live under laws of our own making. Only in our fondest and most youthful dreams have we imagined such a chance. What will we make of it?

Let us make good laws — wise laws, and not too many of them. Let us keep ourselves, our community, our city government, our ideals, as clean as our new, windswept roofs. Let us conduct ourselves and the management of our Greenbelt in such a way as to deserve the pride with which all America will be looking on.

We who have been endowed with the greatest heritage on earth by our ancestors still have that hardiness and determination underneath. Greenbelt will be a success, with the cooperation of her citizens and with the help of God. We will have proved ourselves — we pioneers!

ball field at Braden Memorial Field. It cost \$156,905, including \$4,062 in city-contributed labor and equipment.

In the case of both buildings, equipment and furnishings were provided by volunteer groups. The Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad and the Ladies Auxiliary donated approximately \$12,000 and the Youth Center Advisory Board, through funds raised by Labor Day Festivals and other means, about \$17,000. Plans for the municipal office building are still on the drawing boards.

The original planners of Greenbelt envisioned some development in the environs of the city that would provide employment opportunities for local residents. In April 1960, the first major development providing such opportunities opened — the Federal Government's Goddard Space Flight Center located on a 550-acre tract on Glenn Dale road about two miles east of the Greenbelt exit from the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. As the main research center for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and central control point for this country's Mercury (man-into-space) Project, the Space Center's seven buildings now house 2,300 employees, about two-thirds of whom are scientists and technicians.

Community Planning

For the future, the major problem facing Greenbelt is the development of the vacant land in a way that is

consistent with the principles followed in the original planning of the community. The vacant land, which was subdivided into various parcels and sold by Warner-Kanter in December 1959, has now changed hands several times. Generally each change has precipitated a zoning controversy, because of the desire of some of the owners to concentrate on developing the property as commercial or apartment sites.

The most recent battle developed in early 1962 over an application for commercial zoning by the owners of a 56-acre triangular site bounded by Kenilworth Avenue, Greenbelt Road, and the proposed Circumferential Highway. The county commissioners turned down the application for rezoning, but only after a lively public hearing which saw the community divided as to the wisdom of developing the land for a regional shopping center. At the same time, the county commissioners denied requests for zoning for multiple-family dwellings and apartments on much of the remaining 420 acres of vacant land.

Efforts are now being made by the Advisory Planning Board, a council-appointed group of Greenbelt residents, to prepare a master land plan for Greenbelt, outlining the direction in which the community would like to see future development. The owners of the vacant land have indicated their approval of this approach.

Did You Know?

That the first issue of the *Cooperator* had as contributors present Greenbelters John P. Murray and Fan and Nat Schein and that within the next three years the following

names of present residents appeared on the masthead: Peggy Markfield, Lester Sanders, John C. Maffay, Ben and Ethel Rosenzweig, Elizabeth Goldfaden, Helen and Abe Chasanow.